

THE Chinese Drama

BY

R. F. JOHNSTON, C.B.E., M.A.

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NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

1.—CHAO YÜN (趙雲) or CHAO TZŪ-LUNG (趙子龍), a famous general of the period of the "Three Kingdoms" (Third century A.D.).

CHAO YÜN, who died in 229 A.D. at over eighty years of age, distinguished himself as a warrior at the beginning of that period of civil strife known as the age of the THREE KINGDOMS. He was noted for his unusual height, his personal grace, and his exceptional courage, and was one of the ablest of the generals employed by the celebrated Liu Pei (劉備), who founded the Shu-Han (蜀漢) dynasty in modern Szü-ch'uan. Chao Yün is one of the twenty-four patriot-soldiers who have been associated (under the new Republican reorganization of the cult of military heroes) with the quasi-divine honours paid to Kuan Yü (關羽) and Yo Fei (岳飛), the Chinese "gods of war." A recent account of this cult may be found in *The New China Review*, April 1921, pp. 85-88. Numbers of the most popular plays in China have been founded on real or fictitious episodes in the warlike and romantic era of the Three Kingdoms, and in such plays Chao Yün is frequently given a prominent place among the *dramatis personæ*. It should be added that the fantastic raiment worn by the be-flagged Chao Yün is not exclusively characteristic of this hero. Other great military leaders, when represented on the stage, are very similarly attired.

2.—WU SUNG (武松), a character in the dramatized novel *Shui Hu Chuan* (水滸傳). Period, Sung dynasty (960-1279).

Unlike Chao Yün, Wu Sung is not an historical personage. He is one of the most prominent characters in the well-known novel entitled *Shui Hu Chuan*, which was written in the Yüan (Mongol) period (1280-1367 A.D.) but deals with events ascribed to the Sung dynasty (960-1279). Many episodes in this long and very popular novel have been dramatized, and none are better known than those describing the thrilling adventures of the swashbuckling dare-devil Wu Sung. He is described as a man of enormous physical strength and a dauntless fighter; but though he often championed the cause of the oppressed, and played the part of a loyal friend, his conduct and character were by no means those of the ideal knight-errant as portrayed in European romance. His conduct towards women was not always marked by chivalry, and his treatment of a fallen foe was often unknighly. Among his lesser failings must be recorded a prodigious appetite for food and an insatiable thirst for wine. He was not unknown to eat with his fingers—a deplorable defect in a hero of romance; and he rarely, if ever, went forth to battle in a state of sobriety. When his wild escapades threatened him with destruction he let his hair grow and assumed the disguise of a religious recluse. In spite of his moral and social eccentricities, he is a great favourite with Chinese theatre-goers, who never weary of beholding dramatic representations of such well-known episodes as "Wu Sung beating the tiger" (武松打虎) and "Wu Sung killing his sister-in-law" (武松殺嫂).

3.—MAID SERVANT (侍婢).

4.—FEMALE CHARACTER IN MING COSTUME (明裝婦女).

The dress is not strictly confined to the Ming dynasty characters.

5.—FEMALE CHARACTER IN MANCHU COSTUME (滿州婦女).

6.—PRIME MINISTER IN MING COSTUME (明時宰相).

That the character represents a good Minister and not a bad one is shown by conventional indications in face and beard.

The Chinese Drama.



Introductory.



HERE is no branch of Chinese art or letters that has received less attention from Western students than the Drama. Doubtless this is partly because the Chinese themselves, in spite of their intense love of the theatre, have treated the dramatic art and the theatrical profession with the scantiest respect, and have regarded dramatic compositions as unworthy of a place in the recognized classifications of the national literature; but it is also traceable to a common assumption that drama is a form of art which in China has never advanced to anything like maturity, and to which the Chinese have never made any contribution of high intrinsic value. Nevertheless, whatever the final judgment of the world may be regarding the literary or artistic merits of the Chinese drama, the subject is not one which should be neglected by any student of Chinese life and thought, if only on account of the enormous popularity and great influence of the theatre among all classes of the people. It is surprising to find how meagre are the accounts of the Chinese stage which have been given us even by writers whose whole active lives have been spent in close contact with the people and who have devoted themselves with enthusiasm to the study of the Chinese mind and character. A. Wylie, in his well-known *Notes on Chinese Literature*, dismisses the whole subject with the words "As dramatic works do not find a place in the native book-catalogues, it is unnecessary to enlarge on the subject here." The author of *Village Life in China* very properly included a chapter on the "Village Theatre" in a work which was professedly a study in sociology; but he prefaces his remarks with the significant admission that he had never witnessed an acted play and had no first-hand knowledge of the Chinese stage. Little wonder is it that in the next sentence he unwittingly gives indubitable evidence of that lack of first-hand knowledge which he so candidly admits. Most Chinese plays, he declares, are so extravagantly long that they may be spread over many hours or even over several days. He adds, with amusing exaggeration, that "the most indefatigable European" could not listen to the entire performance of a single play without becoming "utterly exhausted." These and similar judgments have been repeated by others and have obtained great currency in the West.

As a fact, the vast majority of Chinese stage-plays are much shorter than the average European play. The source of the misunderstanding is to be found in the circumstance that although the individual plays are short, they follow one another in very rapid succession; and as there is no "curtain" and no change of scenery (for the adequate reason that in the old-fashioned Chinese theatre there is no scenery at all) it is not surprising that an uninstructed foreigner, having witnessed the performance of two or more complete plays, is apt to go away with the impression that he has seen no more than a single play, and perhaps only a portion of that.

In these few pages it is impossible to present a complete account of the Chinese stage. All that is attempted here is to give a brief description of the theatre in the towns and country districts, a bare outline of the development of the drama through successive ages, and a rapid survey of contemporary movements in the direction of dramatic reform.





1.—CHAO YÜN (趙雲) OR CHAO TZŪ-LUNG (趙子龍), a famous general of the period of the "Three Kingdoms" (Third century A.D.).

THE VILLAGE THEATRE.



HOSE foreigners in China who are bent on avoiding the theatre may do so without much difficulty if they confine themselves to the cities; but in the country districts they will find it less easy to maintain a reputation for total ignorance of the Chinese drama, unless they resolutely shut their eyes when passing through a village street and adopt Herbert Spencer's method of guarding their ears from unwelcome sounds. The reason for this is that in rural China—and it should not be forgotten that the vast majority of the Chinese race work on the soil—all dramatic performances are held in the open air. Whether the stage is a temporary or a permanent structure depends upon the size and affluence of the village. A temporary stage can be constructed in a few hours out of poles, planks and mats; a permanent stage may be a more or less imposing building with a solid stone foundation, a graceful curved roof, and commodious quarters to serve as greenroom. Often the villagers have to wait many years before they can raise the funds necessary to provide their stage with a roof, and meanwhile there is nothing but straw-matting to protect the players from sun and rain. For the comfort of the spectators, the preparations are still more rudimentary. Nothing is charged for admission, because there is no regular auditorium; or for sitting accommodation, because no seats are provided. The spectators stand or squat on such ground as may be available in front of the stage, which occupies a corner of the market-place, or a portion of the main street, or a vacant plot in front of the village-temple. In those parts of China with which the writer is best acquainted (no description is equally true of all parts of this vast country), village theatricals usually have some connexion, more or less remote, with religious or quasi-religious observances, and as such they are known as *shên hsi* (神戲)—“sacred plays.” This term has no reference to their subject-matter, which is wholly secular, but is connected with the theory that stage-plays give pleasure to some popular deity and are therefore a satisfactory means of enlisting his favour and protection. That they also, incidentally, afford pleasure to the entire village community, whose tastes in the drama precisely coincide with those attributed to the divinity in question, should perhaps be regarded as a fortunate accident. This divinity is generally a member of the Taoist pantheon, such as the divine Triad of Ladies who exercise their spiritual sway from their airy sanctuary on the summit of the sacred T'ai mountain, but whose shrines and effigies are to be found throughout the length and breadth of northern China; or Kuan Ti, the

deified hero of the "Three Kingdoms," and commonly referred to by Europeans as the Chinese "God of War;" or Lung Wang, the Dragon-prince, who regulates (or fails to regulate) the rainfall and is therefore largely responsible for the success or failure of harvests.

The performances (consisting of a series of short plays) take place in daylight and extend over a period of three or four days, according to the length of the engagement. If they form part of the festivities connected with some nominally-religious festival, as is often the case, they are paid for out of the temple-revenues. If these are inadequate, the deficit is made up out of the common fund held in trust for this and similar public purposes by a committee of village-elders. If no such fund exists, or has been exhausted, application is made to the villagers for individual subscriptions; and as a failure to respond to such invitations involves a serious "loss of face," it is rarely that applications of this kind are made in vain. Subscribers have the gratification of seeing their names included in a "roll of honour" which is written out on long strips of red paper and pasted on one of the temple-walls.

Apart from the theatricals held regularly at festival-seasons by such villages as can afford the outlay, similar performances are often held at the expense of prosperous individuals, who know from experience that the simplest and surest means of acquiring local popularity is to provide their rustic neighbours with a form of entertainment which is universally regarded as superior to all others. It sometimes happens, too, that a villager who has committed some offence against the *ts'un kuei* or Village Regulations is required to make atonement by engaging a theatrical troupe to perform in the village at his private expense.

The performers consist of travelling actors who roam the countryside seeking engagements. Details of the terms and conditions of each engagement are set forth in written contracts, and there is often much undignified wrangling between the theatrical agents on the one side and the village "managers" on the other before the terms are arranged to mutual satisfaction. The actors provide their own costumes, masks and other properties, which are often sadly the worse for wear. Sometimes among the strolling players are to be found really clever actors who command comparatively high salaries. Many have seen better days in the city-theatres, and have had to descend to the country stage as a result of age, ill-luck, or a dissipated life. The majority have been brought up to the stage from childhood, and have passed through a long and severe probation similar to that of apprentices in the guilds of medieval Europe. Their morals often leave a good deal to be desired, and their happy-go-lucky Bohemian way of life, with its sudden alternations of extreme poverty and comparative affluence, is apt to turn many of them into improvident rascals. But their rascality is of a genial type, and many striking instances could be given of their generosity, kindness and patience, under conditions which might well be expected to warp the character. Neither hunger nor weariness seems to lessen the zeal with which they strut and attitudinize on the stage, or the energy displayed in the production of that extraordinary falsetto which to Chinese ears is inseparable from stage-locution

but to Western ears is one of the most deplorable conventions of the Chinese drama. The plays are mostly old favourites familiar to every adult member of the audience. They are largely founded on venerable legends or romantic episodes in Chinese history, and the characters represent the emperors, warriors, scholars and villains of past ages.

There is a Chinese proverb to the effect that "actors are lunatics, the spectators are idiots" (唱戲的是瘋子, 看戲的是傻子). The former are "lunatics" because they act and speak in a forced and unnatural way and with exaggerated mannerisms; the latter are "idiots" because they are supposed to gape and applaud without comprehension or discrimination. Nevertheless the fact remains that the drama, such as it is, has been for centuries a source of enormous joy to the unnumbered masses of China and has done a great deal to enliven the dull routine of their lives. The author of *Village Life in China* refers appreciatively to the efforts of certain "exceptionally intelligent" magistrates to prohibit all theatrical performances within their districts (surely rather an arbitrary interference with popular rights and liberties), but there is no doubt that if such prohibitions could be enforced the result would be a blank in the lives of the people that nothing else could fill.



THE CITY THEATRE.



IN multitudes of the smaller and many of the larger towns, the theatres are only slightly superior to those of the villages, and the performances are often not much better than those wherewith the strolling "lunatics" enthrall the rustic "idiots." The players in most inland towns, indeed, belong as a rule to the higher grades of those who wander from village to village, thriving or starving in accordance with the quality of the last harvest. The connexion between theatrical performances and religious festivals is not so close or so common in the towns as in the villages, yet the fact that the urban theatre is often found within the courtyard of a temple, or on a public square in front of a temple gateway, shows that the stage has not, even in the towns, become completely secularized.

The players' costumes are as costly and gorgeous as the resources of each theatrical company will permit, the prices of some of the dresses running into figures which, as a foreign observer has noted, would stagger even a West-End manager. In all other respects, however, the staging of a Chinese play is as simple as it well could be. There are two doors at the back of the stage, one for entrances, the other for exits; and close to one of these doors, in the corner, sits the orchestra. As already remarked, there is no scenery, or next to none, and there is no curtain. The stage may contain one or two very simple articles of furniture, such as a chair or two, but frequently it is quite bare. A riding whip can be used to signify a horse, a piece of cloth with a gap in the centre may become a city gateway. Battle-fields, imperial thrones and courts, great rivers and mountains, moving armies, may all be represented on the stage by the simplest of conventional tokens. No wonder the Chinese have a proverb which declares that there is nothing so vast as a stage (天下的東西只有戲台最大) —because, as the English poet Blake said of a grain of sand, a world can be seen within its narrow limits. A Chinese audience is expected to supply, from its own intellectual and imaginative resources, all that is lacking not only in scenery but also in dramatic action. Chinese dramatists tacitly make the same appeal to their audiences as that which was explicitly made by the greatest of Western dramatists to theatregoers in Elizabethan England—namely, to "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts" and to let the players "on your imaginary forces work." Lord Chesterfield said that people who go to the opera should leave their minds at home. Although Chinese dramas are mostly to be classed as operas of one kind or another, no one in China would dream of giving Chesterfield's advice to Chinese theatre-goers, who, in spite of the scurrilous



2.—WU SUNG (武松), a character in the dramatized novel *Shui Hu Chuan* (水滸傳). Period, Sung dynasty (960–1279).

proverb which styles them "idiots," must certainly keep their wits about them if they wish to enjoy and understand what they have come to see and hear.

It is a common source of amusement to European visitors to see an attendant, who has no place among the *dramatis personæ*, stepping forward in full view of the audience to adjust an actor's robe which happens to have become disarranged, or to hand a cup of tea to a bearded eye-rolling hero who has just emerged from a whirlwind of emotional excitement and whose parched throat is rightly judged by the thoughtful management to be in need of a soothing syrup. Still quainter is the sight of a dead man getting up and walking off the stage—perhaps even lending a hand in bearing away his own corpse. Yet such happenings do not strike a Chinese audience as in any way grotesque.

Chinese city theatres, unlike those of the country, provide sitting accommodation for the spectators: yet the general appearance of a well-filled Chinese theatre is, in one important respect at least, very different from that of a Western theatre. Men and women do not sit together. On arriving at the door, even husbands and wives must separate—the women going to one side, the men to another. In some modern theatres this old rule has been relaxed in respect of the private boxes, where the two sexes are now often allowed to intermingle. In many theatres there is a special gallery for women; in those of a very old-fashioned type there is no accommodation for them at all, for time was when a public theatre was a place which women were strictly prohibited from entering.

It is not usual, except in some "reformed" theatres, for tickets to be sold at the door. Each member of the audience is required, however, to spend money on tea and refreshments and other extras, which must be paid for even if they are not wanted. The attendants who minister to the real or fictitious needs of the audience make the most of their opportunities and are not always distinguished for good manners.

What has been said regarding the absence of stage-scenery is applicable to all theatres which follow the Chinese dramatic traditions and accept all the old conventions—that is to say, the vast majority of theatres existing in China at the present day. But mention must be made of recent innovations which, as a result of Western influence and example, have sprung into existence in recent years in some of the great towns. It was in 1905 that the first "modern" theatre was opened in China. It was appropriately named the "New Theatre" (*Hsin Wu-t'ai*), and, as might have been expected, Shanghai was the scene of the experiment. Later on, similar theatres were opened in other large towns; but it was not till 1913 (two years after the revolution that brought the monarchy to the ground) that the capital offered Shanghai the sincerest form of flattery; for it was in that year that the "Number One Theatre" (*Ti I Wu-t'ai*) was opened in Peking. Its reputation as an up-to-date playhouse embodying many Western notions of construction and accommodation is now shared by the *Hsin-ming* or "Civilized" theatre, which was the first in Peking to boast of a curtain that falls at the close of each play.

Up to and including the earlier decades of the Manchu dynasty (which succeeded the Ming in 1644), the principal centres of Chinese dramatic activity were Peking, Nanking and Yangchow. As the great towns of the coast rose into prominence in consequence of having been opened to Western trade, they began to displace the two last-named as theatrical centres. At the present time Peking still maintains its place as the dramatic capital and as the best training-ground for actors. Shanghai comes second, while Tientsin and Hankow rank as third and fourth. In Canton and the large towns of the neighbouring provinces of Kwangsi and Fuhkien, as well as in the British colony of Hongkong, the drama is as flourishing and as popular as it is in the north; but the Cantonese drama, which predominates in the places named, has followed somewhat different styles and traditions from those of the northern drama, and is therefore rightly regarded as standing by itself.



HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT.



THE leading Japanese authority on our subject declares that the Chinese drama is three thousand years old. This is true in the limited sense that there already existed, in the early years of the Chou dynasty (which began its long history in the twelfth century, B.C.), certain constituents of the Chinese drama in their most elementary form. We read, for instance, of the *wu* (巫)—a class of “weird sisters” (and “weird brethren” too, but these seem to have been less numerous) who combined the functions of priests or priestesses, soothsayers, rainmakers, spiritualistic mediums and practitioners in thaumaturgy. The witch-dancing and spell-chanting of these persons are often referred to as having been the source of the Chinese drama. A recent English writer has told us that “poetry was born, like Beatrice, under a dancing star”; and perhaps, if we could trace the Chinese drama to its remotest sources, we should find that it, too, had a terpsichorean star presiding at its birth.

However this may be, it seems clear that the drama in China, as in several other lands, had a quasi-religious origin. It has even been suggested that ancestor-worship contributed something to the evolution of the drama, inasmuch as the *shih* (尸)—the living youth who personated his deceased ancestor at sacrificial ceremonies—necessarily assumed a rôle that was essentially dramatic.

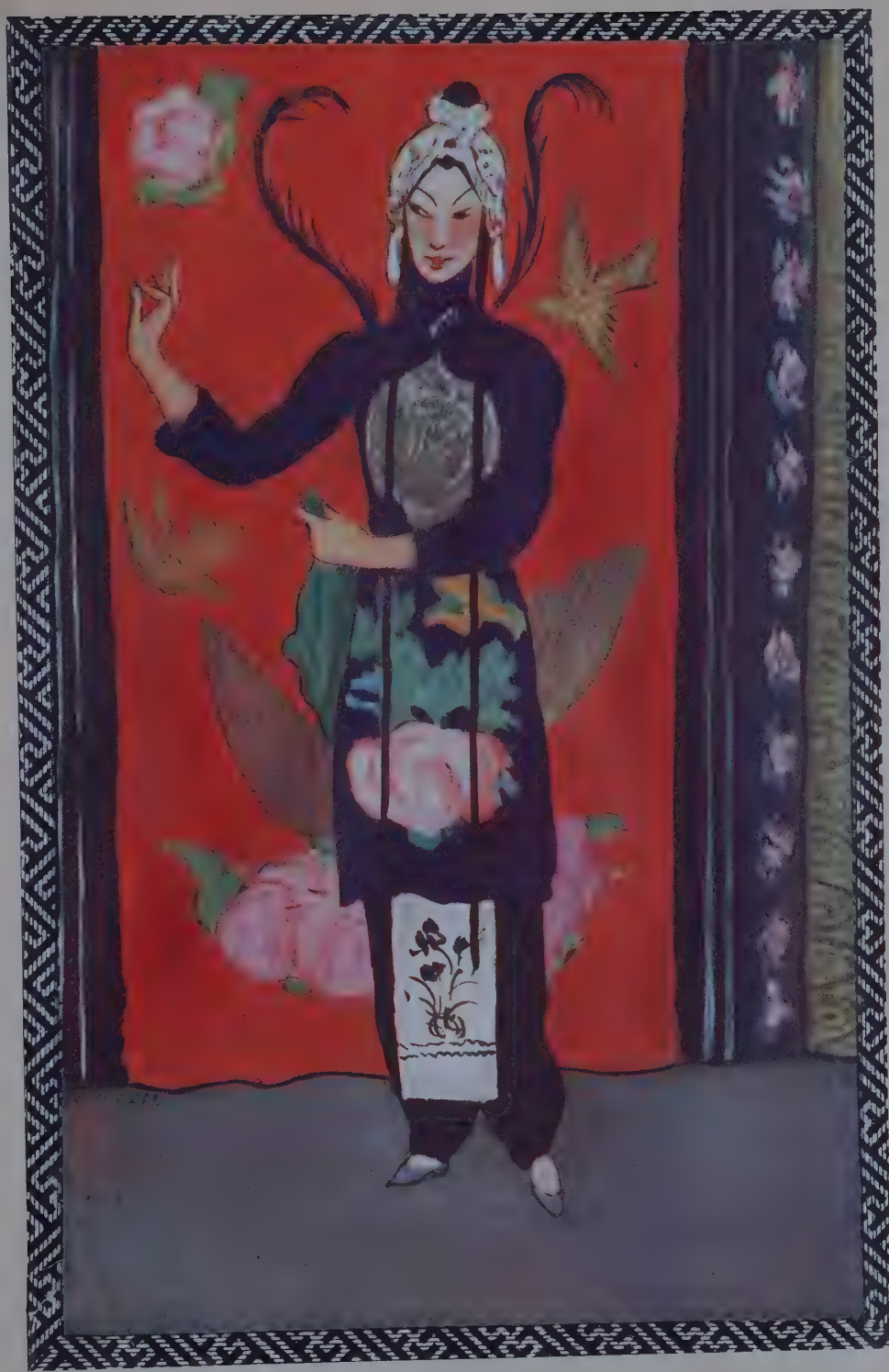
Another stage is reached when we come to the *ch'ang yu* (倡優) and *chu ju* (侏儒) of the Chou and later dynasties. *Ch'ang* means a singer, *yu* is one of the terms used to this day to denote an actor. The *chu ju* were dwarfs, and their position seems to have approximated to that of the licensed court-jesters (many of them also dwarfs) of the European Middle Ages. There is a legend to the effect when the infamous Chieh Kuei (桀癸), last emperor of the Hsia dynasty (died 1763 B.C.), had thrown aside all the decorous rites and ceremonial usages of the olden times, he summoned to his court certain “actors” (*ch'ang yu*) and dwarfs (*chu ju*) and a class of privileged intimates, to perform something of the nature of farces or harlequinades (奇偉之戲); but this is only a tradition of the Han dynasty and may not be based on fact. Much more trustworthy are the statements preserved regarding the actor Shih (施) of the Chin (晉) state, and the actor Mêng (孟) of the Ch'u state. They lived in the so-called “Spring and Autumn” period which ante-dated the time of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). The story of Mêng, who flourished about the year 600 B.C., is preserved in the Historical Memoirs of Ssü-ma Ch'ien. Certainly he was anything but a dwarf, for we are told that he was eight feet high. His name has come down to us

through the ages in connexion with a story which does credit to his goodness of heart and shows that he possessed at least some of the qualities that make a great actor. He was attached to the court of Duke Chuang, one of the greatest of the ruling princes of that age. The duke had a faithful and deserving minister named Sun-shu Ao (孫叔敖), who, having been wrongly dismissed, died and left his son in a state of destitution. Mêng, who had been kindly treated by the minister, took compassion on the youth and resolved to make an attempt to touch the heart of the ungrateful ruler. Having devoted himself for over a year to a close study of the manners, speech and general appearance and bearing of the dead statesman, he personated Shu-shu Ao with such extraordinary success that when he appeared before the duke attired in Sun-shu's hat and robes, the duke was startled and thought that his late minister had returned to life. When he understood the true state of matters he was so delighted with Mêng that he proposed to raise him to the post of prime minister. Mêng declined the honour, and suggested that the person who most deserved the ducal favours was Sun's unfortunate offspring. The duke had the good sense to take the suggestion in good part, summoned his dead minister's son to Court, and forthwith raised him to a position of honour and affluence.

Many of the *yu*, it would appear, were mere jugglers, clowns, acrobats, pole-climbers or licensed jesters; but the leading members of the profession, as the story of Mêng seems to indicate, reached higher artistic levels, and evidently aimed at something better than merely providing an hour's frivolous amusement for the "idle rich." It is conceivable that prepared plays of a rudimentary kind were not unknown, but it is highly probable that most of the professional activities of the *yu* were chiefly of an impromptu kind, and that the "actor" was dependent for success on his own readiness of wit.

The influence of the *yu* on the upper-class morals of the age was variable. While we read of some who openly reprimanded princes for their vices, incompetence or ingratitude, and seem to have done what in them lay to set their patrons on the path of reform, we hear of others—and they, perhaps, were in the majority—who used their influence mainly for selfish purposes, and whose intimacy with those in high places became a public scandal. A certain prince of Wei, for example, is held up to reproach because he exalted his actor-friends and humiliated his ministers. To the philosopher Kuan Tzū (died 645 B.C.) is attributed the saying that when a state is on the verge of disaster, actors (*yu*), singers and dwarfs are consulted on state-affairs. Similarly, Chao Wang (昭王), a dynastic predecessor of the so-called "First Emperor" (third century B.C.), said that Ch'u would be a difficult state to conquer because its swords were sharp and its *ch'ang yu* blunt—that is, stupid. In other words, the state of Ch'u devoted more time to practising the arts of war than to cultivating the arts of revelry.

➤ So far, we have limited ourselves to the Chou dynasty, which, after centuries of slow disintegration, came to a formal end in 222 B.C.. The next dynasty was that of Ch'in (秦), which lasted only a few years (221-207 B.C.)



3.—MAID SERVANT (侍婢).

but is for ever conspicuous in Chinese annals on account of the fame (or infamy) of its founder, the self-styled "First Emperor"—one of the greatest conquerors and administrators the world has seen, although, like most great conquerors, he was unscrupulous in his methods. Aiming at inaugurating a new era in the history of China, he tried to make a clean sweep of all the old cultural traditions; hence that drastic policy, so ruthlessly carried out, of "burning the books and burying the scholars," for which his reign is not unreasonably anathematized by the Confucian literati. However, his hatred of the old culture did not extend to the "drama" of the time, which is perhaps the best proof that as a recognized form of art or literature it had not yet come into existence. It escaped destruction because there was nothing tangible to destroy. At any rate the emperor showed no desire to bury the "actors" along with the scholars. Not only did they remain unmolested, but they basked in the sunlight of imperial favour. With one member of the profession—a man named Chan (旃)—probably a dwarf—the emperor was on terms of intimacy; and this Chan, like his predecessor Mèng, seems to have made a good use of his opportunities, for we are told that he succeeded in checking the tendency shown by the "First Emperor," and also by his son, towards wasteful extravagance.

During the ensuing centuries the *yu* or *yu-ling* (優 伶) maintained their positions as principal providers of more or less innocent amusement at the houses of the great, but dramatic progress was evidently very slow. Nor do the scanty records allow us to say anything of the state of the drama among the people, though doubtless they, like their myriad descendants of to-day, took delight in stage-performances of various kinds.

It was during the Han period, if tradition is to be trusted, that the *yu* or *p'ai yu* (俳優) began to act stories. To the same period belonged the *huang-mèn ch'ang* (黃 門 倡)—"palace singers"—who, 145 in number, performed certain "military dances," accompanied by song. This was about the middle of the first century A.D. When we come to the Northern Ch'i dynasty (550-577 A.D.) we hear of the dramatization of stories accompanied by song and dance. It was also soon after this period that masks representing human faces are said to have been used on the stage for the first time. Masks in the shape of the heads of wild animals had been used at a much earlier date. The introduction of masks is associated by tradition with the name of the prince of Lan-Ling (蘭 陵 王), a noted fighter of the second half of the sixth century A.D., who, much to his own disgust, was the possessor of a girlish face. Irritated at finding that his pink and white features were quite incapable of striking fear into the hearts of his enemies, he adopted the plan of going into battle wearing a "false face" made of carved wood. So terrifying was the aspect of this wooden mask that the foe ran away whenever they saw it, a fact which greatly increased the martial fame of the ingenious prince. In consequence of this episode, masks subsequently became a popular feature of the Chinese stage, and they are still much used.

Further progress is said to have been made during the Sui dynasty (581-618), but up to and including this period the drama was characterized far

more by music and dancing than by action and dialogue. Like the more modern *No* plays of Japan, it seems to have been a lyrical drama consisting mainly of dance and song. It is on account of their musical rather than their histrionic talents that the names of some of the noted "actors" of the time have come down to us. One of these was Wan Pao-ch'ang (萬寶常), who possessed marvellous powers of extracting melodious sounds from the most unpromising articles. Once at a feast the conversation turned on music. To illustrate his view of the matter, Wan took up some of the plates and dishes, and by striking them in turn elicited some remarkable harmonies. Another performer of similar genius was Wan Ling-yen (王令言), who could foretell an emperor's assassination from a musical composition.

It was not till the accession of the T'ang dynasty (618-906) that we find the drama making a distinct advance in scope and dignity. This period, in fact, marks an important epoch in the history of Chinese dramatic art. The main advance took place under the patronage of that ill-starred monarch but rather fascinating personality Ming Huang, the T'ang emperor Hsüan Tsung, who reigned from 713 to 755. He founded a kind of institution for the encouragement of music, dancing and acting, which was known as the Pear Garden (梨園). This famous institution gave its name to a particular style of dramatic music which was predominant at that time, and indeed the name still survives in the phrase applied by actors to themselves—"Disciples of the Pear Garden." The emperor was himself a musical expert, and we are told that when an entertainment was given by his Pear Garden orchestra he always recognized and corrected a false note. He had choruses of boys as well as adults, and an establishment similar to the Pear Garden was created for the training of female singers and actresses.

Ming Huang's name is held in grateful remembrance by the dramatic profession, hence it is not surprising to learn that he is sometimes identified with the patron deity of actors. According to another theory, however, the "God of the Stage" is not the T'ang emperor but a less exalted personage of a much earlier date, to whose mimetic skill and nobility of character we have already had occasion to refer—the actor Mêng of the Ch'u state.

Ming Huang's successors continued to support the drama, and indeed the T'ang dynasty was a Golden Age for singers, dancers and actors, both male and female. During this epoch their arts were certainly not despised by the leaders of society, who themselves often took part in amateur theatricals and sometimes engaged famous professionals as their teachers.

The period of strife and rapid dynastic change that elapsed between the fall of the T'ang and the rise of the Sung dynasties was naturally less propitious for the arts, yet we read of an emperor (Chuang Tsung of the Posterior T'ang dynasty) who actually performed on the stage in the company of professional actors, and adopted a "stage-name" (李天下). This was in the first half of the tenth century.

According to Chinese writers, there have been three important epochs in the history of the national drama. The first of these extends from 720 (in the reign of Ming Huang) to the fall of the T'ang dynasty in 906. The plays in vogue during this time were known as *ch'uan ch'i* (傳奇). The second epoch, 960 to 1119, coincides with the years of the Sung dynasty up to and including the reign of Hui Tsung, during which time the favourite plays were known as *hsi ch'ü* (戲曲). The third—1125 to 1367—covers the period of the rule of the Golden Tatars in Northern China and the whole period of the Yüan (Mongol) dynasty. During this epoch the plays were known as *yüan pên* (院本) and *tsa chi* (雜劇), which were originally one and the same but became differentiated in the Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty. To the uninitiated these names convey nothing, nor is this the place to enter into technical details which could hardly be understood except by those who have some familiarity with the machinery of Chinese stage-plays. The differences are mainly concerned with the relation of the musical part of the play to the dialogue, the relative prominence given to the various features of the entertainment as a whole, the number of actors allowed to be on the stage simultaneously, the nature of the subjects dramatized and the manner of the presentation.

The principal imperial patrons of the drama under the Sung dynasty were T'ai Tsu (960-976), Chên Tsung (998-1022) and Hui Tsung (1101-1125). The last-named, who took a genuine interest in the arts and was himself a painter of considerable merit, is said to have introduced various changes in theatrical costumes, and to have got the idea from the dress of certain foreign envoys at his court.

Even as late as the Sung dynasty there was still a lingering tendency to regard the actor as a kind of licensed jester, and it was not only on the stage that he was expected to display his skill. Conspicuous among the members of his profession during this age was one Li Chia-ming (李家明), of whom two characteristic stories may be related. On one occasion he was in attendance on the emperor at a picnic or garden-party in a park adjoining the capital. The emperor remarked that the clouds on a distant hill indicated rain. "Yes," said Li Chia-ming, "there will be rain, but it will not enter the city." "How do you know that?" questioned his imperial master. "Because it is afraid of the heavy taxes that would be imposed upon it if it entered the gates" was the reply. The emperor, we are told, took the hint and lightened the oppressive dues to which Li had so ingeniously alluded. On a similar occasion, when the emperor and his court were amusing themselves by fishing in a stream that flowed through a pleasure park, his majesty became very irritable on noticing that while his courtiers were successful in catching many a fat fish, he himself failed to land a single one. Li Chia-ming came to the rescue with an impromptu epigram, in which it was explained that no fish dared to touch the imperial bait because the only animal that could presume to accept the honour of being caught by the Son of Heaven was a dragon. This explanation restored

his majesty to high good humour, but—like a wise man—he instantly pulled up his fishing-line and laid it aside for the day.

The drama continued to prosper under the Liao and Golden Tatars, who ruled northern China during the later decades of the Sung dynasty. The Tatar aristocracy, indeed, brought their love of the theatre from their ancestral homes in the north-west, and had little to learn of the drama from China. Bands of players were officially attached to the Courts of several of the Tatar sovereigns, and the drama flourished exceedingly in several styles. Youths distinguished for their grace or nimbleness of mind or body were greatly in demand at the houses of princes and high officials, who maintained them in comfort and treated them as highly-privileged retainers.

In 1192, during the reign of the Tatar emperor Chang Tsung (1190-1208), players were prohibited from impersonating the sovereigns of the past or present times, but in practice this rule has been generally disregarded in respect of all dynasties other than the reigning one. To the same reign belonged the writer Tung Chieh-yüan (董解元), author of a poetical novel which became the foundation of one of the most famous of all Chinese dramas—the *Hsi Hsiang Chi* (西廂記), or "Story of the Western Pavilion."

The mention of this well-known play brings us to the Yüan (Mongol) dynasty (1280-1367), for it was written in the early years of that period. We have now come to an epoch which is more famous than any other in the annals of the Chinese stage. So completely does the drama of the Mongol period overshadow that of all preceding ages that some writers consign all former periods to oblivion and treat the drama as though it sprang into existence with the establishment of the Mongol sway. A main justification for this procedure is that practically all pre-Mongol dramatic literature has been lost. Mongol dramas, on the contrary, we have in abundance, and there seems to be no reason to doubt the accuracy of the accepted belief that here we have a case of the survival of the fittest. Dr. H. A. Giles, in his *Chinese Literature*, declares that "nothing which can be truly identified with the actor's art seems to have been known until the thirteenth century, when suddenly the Drama, as seen in the modern Chinese stage-play, sprang into being." He goes on to suggest that the drama was not indigenous to China but may have been introduced by the Tatars, who, as we have seen, were deeply interested in the theatre and in the training of actors. Dr. Giles's view (which is shared by other competent judges) is perhaps somewhat exaggerated, but it may readily be conceded that the sudden and rapid progress of the drama during the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries was a direct result of the establishment of Mongol rule and must have been in large measure due to the fact that in the ancestral home of the Mongols the drama had already arrived at a higher stage of development than it had reached in China.

The political sway of the Mongols in China was brief, and in most respects they caused but a temporary ripple on the placid surface of Chinese social life; but in the drama their influence has survived the rise and fall of



4.—FEMALE CHARACTER IN MING COSTUME (明裝婦女)

two succeeding dynasties, and still subsists, menaced but not overthrown, in this new era of restlessness and change.

One of the most celebrated dramatists of this productive epoch was Wang Shih-fu (王實甫), who wrote, among many other works, the famous "Story of the Western Pavilion" already referred to—a play which has not only delighted generations of readers and play-goers, but has also been a source of inspiration to artists. Among other leading writers for the stage were Shih Chün-mei (施君美), Ma Chih-yüan (馬致遠) and Ch'iao Li-fu (喬立符). Many of the works of these and other writers are preserved in a well-known collection of Mongol dynasty plays, which deserves to occupy a place in every library of Chinese literature. Several of the most famous plays have been translated into European languages.

The dramatic compositions of the Mongol dynasty were undoubtedly the finest literary productions of that period of Chinese history. On account of the low esteem in which the drama was held by orthodox scholars, these brilliant writings were sadly neglected during the Ming and Manchu periods; yet there were always a discerning few who admired them for the skill with which they portrayed human passions and manners, and for the simplicity and naturalness of their diction.

Not only did the Mongol drama far surpass anything of the kind previously known in China, but the player's art also made notable progress. The profession itself attained a dignity which it has not been able to maintain at the same level, and it was a comparatively common thing for young men of good family to go on the stage as professional performers.

The accession of the Ming dynasty (1368-1643) brought about certain changes in dramatic fashions—the northern style of musical drama in vogue in Peking gradually giving place to the southern style which was known as *k'un-ch'ü* (崑曲). This was largely due to the fact that during the early decades of the Ming dynasty the capital was fixed at Nanking; and even when the emperor Ch'êng Tsu (Yung Lo) removed to Peking, the southern style maintained its ascendancy and was not dethroned till some time after the accession of the Manchu dynasty.

The drama as a whole continued to flourish under the patronage of the imperial Court. Among the leading dramatists of the dynasty were T'ang Hsien-tsu (湯顯祖), who wrote the "Peony Pavilion" (牡丹亭), and Yüan Ta-chên (阮大鍼). A play which in the opinion of many Chinese critics has a place in the highest rank of Chinese stageplays is the "Story of the Guitar" (琵琶記), which was written towards the end of the fourteenth century by Kao Tsé-ch'êng (高則誠). It was translated into French by Bazin many years ago.



THE MANCHU DYNASTY.



HE drama suffered no eclipse under the rule of the Manchus (1644-1911). From first to last the imperial house and princely families shared the delight of the masses in the national drama, and theatricals were always an indispensable accompaniment of court-festivals. In the earliest years of the dynasty perhaps the most conspicuous name in the dramatic world is that of Wu Wei-yeh (吳偉業), better known by his pen-name of Mei Ts'un (梅村). He was a Government official, who found time for writing a good deal of creditable poetry as well as some plays. His best play was the *T'ung T'ien T'ai* (通天台). A contemporary of his, Yu T'ung (尤侗), wrote plays which won the admiration of the emperor Shêng Tsu (K'ang-hsi), who had them set to music for performance by the court-players. Kao Tsung (Ch'ien-lung) was even more devoted to the drama than K'ang-hsi. He caused a great collection of extant plays to be made by Chang Chao (張照), a noted poet and man of letters who died in 1745; and the emperor himself wrote dramatic pieces which were performed at Court and doubtless received the applause which invariably greets the literary efforts of sceptred authors. Among recent imperial patrons of the drama was the ill-starred empress-dowager T'zû Hsi, who, in spite of the epithet "Great" sometimes rather fatuously bestowed upon her by Western writers, will surely be held responsible by history for having brought about the ruin of the dynasty and the collapse of the throne. Had she contented herself with witnessing and arranging (and also, so it is whispered, taking a personal part in) the theatrical entertainments which were undoubtedly one of her main sources of enjoyment, and had she refrained from interfering with the reform measures of the unhappy emperor Tê Tsung (Kuang-hsü), it is possible that China might have been spared most of the miseries of the past twenty years. It is by no means certain, however, that the drama would have entered upon a new era of brilliant creative activity even if the "Old Buddha" had decided to give it her undivided attention, for her taste in literature and art was far from faultless, and her influence in the drama, as in matters of graver import, was not wholly salutary.

One great figure in the dramatic history of the Manchu dynasty demands special mention, if only because the foremost Chinese dramatic critic of to-day—Professor Soong Tsung-faung (宋春舫) of the State University of Peking, describes him as a wonderful genius who excelled all the other playwrights of the Manchu dynasty and was perhaps the greatest dramatist ever produced by

China. This was Li Li-wèng (李笠翁), novelist, dramatic critic and author of fifteen plays, of which ten are extant. His dramas contain more dialogue than the majority of Chinese plays. In the judgment of the critic just mentioned, he deserves to be described as the Chinese Scribe, though unlike the great French dramatist he did not create a school. Another prominent dramatist of the Manchu period was Chiang Hsin-yü (蔣心餘), some of whose work has been compared to the poetry of the T'ang dynasty.

The playwright's craft was healthily stimulated during this epoch by the rise of a school of dramatic criticism. Among the ablest writers of the school was Li T'iao-yüan (李調元), whose "Remarks on the Drama" (曲話), written about 1763, is among the best works of its class. Another well-known work of the same name was written by Liang T'ing-nan (梁廷枏); and the great dramatist Li Li-wèng (李笠翁) ably discussed dramatic technique in his *I Chia Yen* (一家言).

After the middle of the Manchu period, the long-established style of opera known as *k'un-ch'ü* (崑曲) gradually fell into decay, and its place was taken by what is often known as the Modern Drama (今戲 or 新劇), which is specially distinguished for its simplicity, freedom from embellishments and its use of colloquial speech. This style of musical drama has maintained its popularity to the present day, in the forms known as *hsi huang hsi* (西黃戲) and *p'i-huang-hsi* (皮黃戲). Foreigners who wish to learn something of the nature of this dramatic music may now do so readily enough without visiting a Chinese theatre; for *hsi-huang* and *p'i-huang* music is now procurable in countless gramophone records.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CHINESE DRAMA.



THE great majority of the extant Chinese plays dating from the Mongol dynasty onwards may be classified, according to Western standards, as musical comedies, historical operas, musical farces, burlesques and operettas. Non-musical plays were unknown in China until the recent introduction of dramas modelled on or translated from Western languages; and these Western adaptations, it may be noted, have hitherto met with a very chilly reception. Without music, indeed, a Chinese play would almost inevitably cease to be recognizably Chinese, and would certainly fail to attract the enthusiastic crowds that now frequent the Chinese theatre in both town and country. If we visit a Chinese theatre in order to seek confirmation of the English poet's assertion that "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet," we may find it in the dramatic music which we shall hear there; for it is this, more than anything else, which alienates most foreigners from the Chinese drama. Nevertheless the ear-splitting gong-beating, which is the most objectionable feature of Chinese theatrical music to Western ears, can be avoided by a discreet withdrawal from the theatre when a *wu* or "military" play is being presented; and the softer strains of the flutes and the *hu-ch'in* (a sort of violin) and several other instruments are often bewitching in their sweetness.

An obvious weakness of the Chinese drama is the persistency with which it draws its material from ancient history, to the total neglect of modern conditions and problems. By fostering the spirit of conservatism, which in China stood in no need of stimulation, the theatre has remained out of touch with present-day life and can claim no credit whatever for having made even the smallest contribution towards the intellectual awakening of this ancient land. This is a weakness which must become more and more glaringly obvious as the thoughts and aspirations now largely confined to the select group of intellectuals known as "Young China" begin seriously to agitate the masses.

Another fault of most Chinese plays is that improbabilities are far too numerous, and that they are brought about by the improbable actions of improbable people. Thus the Chinese stage only rarely holds the mirror up to nature, and cannot be said to offer a valid "criticism of life." Connected with the fault just mentioned is the too frequent recourse to coincidence. Even the



5.—FEMALE CHARACTER IN MANCHU COSTUME (滿州婦女).

famous Li Li-wêng was sometimes guilty of this slipshod method of plot-construction, which mars, for example, his play "The Dreamland House" (夢中樓).

If we regard the Chinese theatre as an ethical force, we may admit at once that its moral influence is for the good, in a certain limited sense. That is to say, good and evil are clearly differentiated—perhaps too clearly—and while good is given its due encouragement and reward, evil is held up to obloquy and receives its appropriate punishment. But this, as recent Chinese critics have themselves perceived, is elementary and uninteresting. One such critic, at least, has shown how frequently the plot of a Chinese drama has been spoiled by a superstitious servility to the Buddhistic theory of *karma*, as expressed in the old saying *shan yu shan pao, o yu o pao*—"do good and good will come to you, do evil and evil will be your fate." In real life this is not always true, and many a good story has been ruined for dramatic purposes by the dramatist's attempt to convince his audience that evil is always punished, good invariably triumphant. The general acceptance of this theory, it need hardly be said, is largely responsible for the fact that tragedy, in the Western sense of the word, can hardly be said to exist in Chinese drama. Aristotle laid down the principle that in tragedy there were three forms of plot to be avoided. In the first place, a good man must not be represented as passing from a life of happiness into final and utter misery. Secondly, a bad man must not be shown as passing from misery to a life of permanent happiness. Thus far, the Chinese theory and practice coincide with the Greek; but Chinese drama shows us many examples of what Aristotle condemned as the third kind of bad plot—an extremely evil man falling from a condition of prosperity to a condition of woe. Aristotle objected to this kind of plot on the ground that in such a situation there is nothing to excite either pity or fear—a point of view which, being closely connected with the famous *katharsis* theory, has never been adopted by Chinese dramatists.

It has often been remarked of the Chinese that they are "born actors," and certainly their best professional players have little to learn, regarding the essentials of their art, from their brethren in the West. Dr. H. A. Giles mentions a story of an actor of the K'ang-hsi period, whose painful duty it was to play the part of a treacherous scoundrel of the Sung dynasty named Ch'in Kuei, the betrayer of the hero Yo Fei. The performance was so realistic that an excited spectator rushed up to the unfortunate actor and stabbed him to death on the stage. It cannot be denied, however, that the mannerisms of Chinese actors (for which they are in no wise to blame, as they are only following rigid traditions and conventions) are somewhat exasperating to European spectators. It may be added that the theatrical profession does not, in China, take itself quite so seriously as it does in Europe. Bernard Shaw has told us that actors should be regarded not as "hired buffoons and posturers" but as "hierophants of a cult as eternal and sacred as any professed religion in the world." In China, the general adoption of any such theory would be

inconceivable without a complete change in the official Chinese attitude towards the drama and the stage. Yet, after all, this attitude is less contemptuous in practice than it is in theory; and though popular favourites such as Mei Lan-fang (one of the most celebrated actors in China to-day) are not exactly looked upon as the hierophants of a sacred cult, they undoubtedly excite a far deeper and more sympathetic interest than any priest, and their theatres are thronged by far larger and more appreciative crowds than are to be found within the precincts of China's innumerable temples.



THE DRAMA UNDER THE REPUBLIC.



HE gradual rise of new conceptions of the dignity and seriousness of the dramatist's art and its potentialities as an inspiring or reformatory influence in society, can be traced to the early years of the present century. A knowledge of the modern European drama had reached China some years before the outbreak of the Revolution of 1911, and the inevitable result was a movement for dramatic reform. The establishment of a Republic (so-called) accelerated the movement, which at one time seemed likely to effect a speedy transformation both in the drama itself and in the manner of its presentation. The reforming zeal of the foreign-educated young enthusiasts carried them too far, in this as in many other matters. They made the mistake of supposing that because they themselves, owing to their Western education, were deeply interested in the social and political problems that were agitating the West, their less widely-read and more conservative countrymen must necessarily have the same interests. So they set to work to translate and introduce to Chinese audiences and readers some of the most "advanced" of European social dramas and problem-plays. Even the small measure of success which at first attended some of these efforts was deceptive, because to a great extent the public interest, such as it was, in these experiments, was mainly the outcome of curiosity. That curiosity having been satisfied, the Western drama in China underwent a period of eclipse from which it has not yet emerged.

Among the earliest Western dramatists who engaged the attention of Chinese translators was Bernard Shaw. "Mrs. Warren's Profession" was the first of his plays to be presented on the Chinese stage, but its run was disappointingly brief, though its ill-success should surely have caused no surprise to those who knew China. Other dramatists, English, French, German and Scandinavian, received in their turn the homage of various Chinese coteries, the chief favourite, perhaps, being Ibsen. But plays translated or adapted from Western languages are now rarely to be seen on the professional stage. An alert and highly educated Chinese may have intellectual sympathy with the subject-matter of many Western dramas, but emotional sympathy will probably be lacking unless he has lived long abroad, has come into living touch with Western problems, and has at least temporarily identified himself with many Western interests and ways of thought. The ordinary Chinese play-goer, who has never been abroad, is sure to be bored by plays which appeal neither to his intellect nor to his emotions. Moreover, it should be remembered that what the

Chinese love best, as one of their own countrymen has recently said, is to see on the stage a sort of Fairyland—something never seen on sea or land, something to take them out of themselves and this workaday world; and the louder the music, the more extravagant the gestures and action, the wilder the dialogue, the more they like it. What they want—and in this they are far from being unique among the races of the world—is something that ordinary life has never given them and can never give. They have no craving for a drama that is true to life, and even if they had, they could hardly be expected to go to Western lands in search of it.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Soong Tsung-faung, profoundly versed as he is in the modern Western drama, is by no means so radically-inclined as some of his friends, who, if they had their way, would abolish the old *p'i-huang* and other Chinese musical plays altogether and substitute a non-musical drama wholly based on Western models. What he recommends is that there should be no direct competition or struggle for survival between the old and the new, but that the drama of the old school should be left undisturbed and allowed to occupy the place taken by the Opera in Europe, while the new non-musical drama should pursue an independent course of its own. This surely is excellent counsel, and will not, it is to be hoped, be lightly disregarded.

Some writers, like Mr. Chèng Chèn-to (鄭振鐸) and Mr. Ch'én Ta-pei (陳大悲), believe that the beginnings of a new drama, set free from all bondage to the past and independent also of foreign models, will best be brought about through the agency of the amateur stage, because it lends itself to free experiment, and considerations of what will "pay" do not arise. This implies, of course, that the new drama would be mainly in the hands of enthusiasts in the colleges and universities: a result which would have certain advantages but also some obvious drawbacks, for there is at present, and may subsist for a long time, a deep chasm between the modern educational world of China and the vast world that lies outside the colleges.

It would be most unfair to say that the modernizing movement has been, up to the present, a total failure. It has not accomplished all it set out to accomplish, but it has certainly had some excellent results in various directions. For example, the spade-work done by the reformers has already begun to effect a change for the better in the status of the actor. As is well-known, actors constituted one of the four classes of persons who were regarded as so degraded that they and their offspring were debarred from official employment. Now, however, with no lack of encouragement from outside their own ranks, the actors are beginning to raise themselves out of their traditional status of humiliation. In Shanghai they have quite recently formed themselves into a kind of Trade-Union (伶界聯合會) one of the specific objects of which is to remove from the profession all traces of social stigma. They are realizing, moreover, the urgent necessity of improving their own standard of education, which is still deplorably low. They are beginning to understand that the drama itself must cease to be simply a means of wiling away an idle hour or two. Actors cannot



6.—PRIME MINISTER IN MING COSTUME (明時宰相).

receive honour unless the drama itself is honoured, and this is not likely to be the happy lot of the old-fashioned unreformed Chinese drama. A main function of the drama should be to educate—but how can education be carried on successfully through totally ignorant actors?

Little need be said of the position and prospects of actresses, for they still form only a minute fraction of the profession. It is still considered impossible, in China, for actresses and actors to be seen together on the same stage. Female parts are taken by boys and young men, and many of the most famous of Chinese actors are those who confine themselves to female impersonations. Conversely, in theatres where there are women-players, male as well as female parts are taken by actresses; but though there are several such theatres in Tientsin and elsewhere, where the players are all women, their popularity with the public is only moderate.

Much of the work of the dramatic reform movement is being carried out through the medium of publications issued by the school of literary reformers whose centre of influence is the Peking State University, and through certain progressive periodicals such as *The Dawn* (曙光). Most useful work, mainly historical, has been brilliantly performed by the well-known scholar and archaeologist Mr. Wang Kuo-wei (王國維) in his admirable *History of the Drama of the Sung and Yüan Dynasties* (宋元曲戲史), which well deserves to be translated into English or French. Another very recent publication which should not be neglected by students of the subject who can read Chinese is *The Chinese Drama* (中國劇) by a Japanese long resident in China who is well-known to his Chinese and foreign friends as T'ing-Hua (聽花). It is understood that English and Japanese versions of this most interesting and trustworthy book, which at present exists only in Chinese, are now in course of preparation.

A further step in the critical study of the Chinese drama and dramatic problems has been taken only this year (1921) by the issue of an admirably-edited monthly magazine which is entirely devoted to the subject of the drama and has enlisted the services of some very able writers. As is usually the case with modern Chinese publications which propagate advanced views, the articles in this periodical, which is appropriately named *The Drama* (戲劇), are written in *pai-hua*—the spoken language—which is more and more coming to be used for literary purposes, and necessarily appeals to a much wider public than can be reached by writers who confine themselves to the traditional forms of literary expression. It is the organ of a society which expressly aims at the creation of an atmosphere favourable to the evolution of a new popular drama, but its writers are alive to the mistakes made by some of their predecessors, and realize that no drama can hope to attain success in China unless it bases itself upon life as it is actually lived in China, accepts the conditions necessitated by Chinese mentality, and draws upon the European drama not for purposes of servile imitation but solely for dramatic material. An excellent augury for the future consists in the fact that these able young writers are

fully aware of the national importance of their task; for as creators or inspirers of a new drama adequate to the needs of a people so passionately attached to the theatre as are the Chinese, and so susceptible to its influences whether for good or ill, they realize that on them rests no small responsibility for the destinies of the New China that must eventually arise phoenix-like from the ashes of the past.

